

Finding the Right Coping Skills for Managing Stress with IBD

**Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America
Palo Alto Patient and Family Education Symposium
Saturday, April 5, 2014**

Bayla Travis, Psy.D.
drbaylatravis@gmail.com

Who I am:

- Provide psychotherapy at Highland Hospital's Pain Management and Functional Restoration Clinic and also at Fairmont Hospital's Rehabilitation Psychology Clinic for patients with acute medical conditions
- Daughter of a mom with Crohn's Disease

Today's Talk:

- Overview of the relationship between stress and illness
- Some practical ways to use the mind and body to alleviate stress
- Discussion: what has worked for you?

How is Discomfort Beneficial?

- Calls attention to problem
- Can lead to treatment and healing
- Survival is in favor of those who pay attention to their discomfort
- Over time, nature has selected those who paid attention – in other words, those who “stressed” survived longer, and therefore were more likely to reproduce

Your Mind on Stress

Results In:

- Behavioral Responses “actions”
- Cognitive Responses “thinking”

Behavioral Responses

- “fight or flight”
- triggers many physiological changes in the body
- heart rate speeds up, respiration increases, blood supply is diverted from the gut to larger muscles to enable the body to fight or flee
- may have a direct impact on gut functioning (the body is focused on more important things than digestion)
- May have an indirect impact on immune functioning and inflammation

Cognitive Responses

- the “story” about what’s going on

Here is How the Mind and
Body Work Influence Each
Other

Stress and Symptoms



Cognitive Distortions that Commonly Exacerbate Stress

- all or nothing thinking: “If I don’t change my diet my symptoms will return.”
- catastrophic thinking: “This feeling means I need surgery.”
- disqualifying the positive: “But I was only able to get a few things done today.”
- “should” statements: “I should be able to handle this better after going to that talk on stress and illness.”

How do you talk to yourself?

- Emotional impact of words: Yes/No exercise
- What are some thoughts you tell yourself about your illness (or the illness of a family member)?
- Might there be some distortion involved?
- Might there be an alternative thought that would be less stressful?

Radical Acceptance

- Alternative to thought substitution
- Based on Buddhist idea that pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional
- Idea is that suffering comes from wanting to change the situation “this should NOT be happening,” “this MUST stop”
- Relief can come from accepting that it is part of your reality right now, even though you wish that it was not

Behavioral Interventions

- Breathing
- Pacing
- Warm bath
- Relaxing music
- Enjoyable Media
- Phone a Friend

Abdominal breathing or diaphragmatic breathing

- turns off the fight or flight
- natural breathing of newborn babies and sleeping adults
- involves slow, deep breaths by relaxing your belly
- this involves using your diaphragm
- the stomach expands as the diaphragm moves downward to allow air to fill the lungs
- Your belly will feel like a balloon expanding and contracting

Important Behavioral Interventions

Be Prepared

- Prepare for the unexpected when out of the house: have your “to-go” kit ready in an attractive little bag with change of clothes/wipes, medications, etc.
- Document your “panic plan” - your “go to” phone numbers for people who are supportive, doctors' contact numbers, list of cognitive and behavioral interventions that help the most

Things to Remember

- Just because an intervention isn't working, it doesn't mean you aren't doing it right
- Different things work at different times
- Sometimes nothing works
- Your feelings are like an elephant, and you are the rider on top of the elephant, so be nice to the elephant

Digital Intervention

Download: Toiletfinder app